

AMERICAN DENDROBATID GROUP

Newsletter No. 5

September-October 1992

The purpose of the ADG is to develop better communication between Dendrobatid breeders in North America. This is not a replacement of the ISSD Bulletin. It is designed to keep dendrobatid frog breeders in better communication with one another. We hope that with this communication we will be able to solve some of the problems which confront us all. This newsletter will appear bimonthly and will cost \$5.00 annually to cover printing and mailing.

Subscriptions, comments, etc. should be sent to Charles Powell (2932 Sunburst Dr., San Jose, CA 95111 Tel.: (408) 363-0926) or Terry Chatterton (8007 Ridge Rd., Arvada, CO 80002 Tel.: (303) 340 7647).

New Book Announcement

A new book, Catálogo Taxonómico, Biogeográfico y Bibliográfico de las Ranas de Venezuela [Taxonomic, Biogeographic and bibliographic catalogue of the frogs of Venezuela] by Prof. Enrique La Marca; can be ordered for \$9.00US from Universidad de Los Andes, Taller de Publicaciones, Facultad de Ciencias Forestales, Via los Chorros de Milla, Mérida, Venezuela (drafts payable to Facultad de Ciencias Forestales). (Thanks to the BDG, No. 13, 1992).

If anyone is interested in collecting money to order multiple copies for ADG members please contact either Newsletter editor and we will make an announcements in the next issue.

New Dendrobatid Frog

The brightly coloured poison-dart frogs - whose toxic skin alkaloids are used by a few groups of Amerindian hunters to tip their blow-gun darts - are undoubtedly the best known members of their family, the Dendrobatidae. Other brightly coloured species are much less toxic, though their bitter alkaloids still render them unpalatable to most predators. And still other frogs in this family are actually drably coloured and harmless. Nonetheless, all dendrobatids which are confined to Central and South America, do share some characteristics: they are relatively small, active by day, and are typically found in rainforest habitats including stream banks.

At least, that used to be the case, until one particular individual was found in the cloudforest of the Venezuelan Andes, that broke all the rules. At 62 mm long, it was relatively huge by this family's standards. It was nocturnal. It seemed to spend most of its time in water, rather than near it. And rather than relying on poisonous skin for defence, this new frog's response to being handled was to release a vile-smelling skin secretion, a response that quickly led to its common name of 'Venezuelan skunk frog' (American Museum Novitates, no. 3002).

Despite its unusual behaviour, the frog could be assigned to the family Dendrobatidae on the basis of certain bone structures and muscles that are typically dendrobatid. The frog's discoverers - Dr. Charles Myers of the American Museum of

Natural History, Dr. Alfredo Paolilo O of BIOMA in Venezuela, and Dr. John Daly of the US National Institutes of Health - have been unable to find any other species that is even closely related. With the freedom to come up with a new genus name, as well as a specific one, they have homed in on the Venezuelan skunk frog's most distinctive characteristics, dubbing it *Aromobates nocturnus*.

The smell produced by the frog is described by Dr. Daly, who has the unenviable task of analysing the chemical responsible, as reminiscent of a mercaptan, the same type of organosulphur compound emitted by skunks. To date, though, Dr. Daly has been unable to identify any particular malodorous chemical. As he told BBC Wildlife, 'The human nose can detect mercaptans at the part per billion level, and is therefore far more sensitive than mass spectrometry' (Reprinted from BBC Wildlife, June 1992, p. 12).

Want Adds: For Sale

Dendrobates truncatus

\$50 ea

Terry Chatterton

D. azureiventris

\$50 ea

8007 Ridge Road

Arvada, CO 80002

(303) 420 7647

Dendrobates leucomelas

Ed Oshaben

Dendrobates tinctorius 'Tafelberg'

4154 Lincoln Ave..

Willoughby, Ohio 44094-6035

Dendrobates pumilio (orange) \$50 ea

Bill Peterson

One Riegel Oaks Lane

Homewood, IL 60430

Dendrobates tinctorius 'Yellow Back'

Charles Powell

(1, year old frog) \$100

2932 Sunburst Dr.

San Jose, CA 95111

(408) 363 0926

New Members

Jon Conant (California)

Billy Myers (Scotland)